

THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY 113

Dorian Gray leaped to his feet, with flushed cheeks and burning eyes. "Harry! Sibyl Vane is sacred!" "It is only the sacred things that are worth touching," said Lord Henry, with a strange touch of pathos in his voice. "But why should you be annoyed? I suppose she will belong to you some day. When one is in love, one always begins by deceiving oneself, and one always ends by deceiving others. That is what the world calls a romance. You know her, at any rate, I suppose?" "Of course I know her. On the first night I was at the theatre, the horrid old Jew came round to the box after the performance was over, and offered to take me behind the scenes and introduce me to her. I was furious with him, and told him that Juliet had been dead for hundreds of years, and that her body was lying in a marble tomb in Verona. I think from his blank look of amazement, that he was under the impression that I had taken too much champagne, or something." "I am not surprised." "Then he asked me if I wrote for any of the newspapers. I told him I never even read them. He seemed terribly disappointed at that, and confided to me that all the dramatic critics were in a conspiracy against him, and that they were every one of them to be bought." "I should not wonder if he was quite right there. But, on the other hand, judging from their appearance, most of them cannot be at all expensive." "Well," he seemed to think they were beyond his means, "laughed Dorian. " By this time, however, the lights were being put out in the theatre, and I had to go. He wanted me to try some cigars that he strongly recommended. I declined. The next night, of course, I arrived at the place again. When he saw me he made me a low bow, and assured me that I was a munificent patron of art. He was a most offensive brute, though he had an extraordinary passion for Shakespeare. He told me once, with an air of pride, that his five bankruptcies were entirely due to 'The Bard,* as he insisted on calling him. He seemed to think it a distinction." "It was a distinction, my dear Dorian—a great distinction. Most people become bankrupt through having invested too heavily in the prose of life. To have ruined oneself over poetry is an honour. But when did you first speak to Miss Sibyl Vane?" "The third night. She had been playing Rosalind. I could